

LIGHT-EMITTING DIODE LIGHTING CIRCUIT

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application claims priority under 35 USC 119 to Japanese Patent Application No. 2002-340798 filed on November 25, 2002 the entire contents thereof are hereby incorporated by reference.

Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates to a light-emitting diode lighting circuit. More particularly, to a light-emitting diode lighting circuit which can prevent the light-emitting diode from being erroneously illuminated due to leakage or the like of a switch which instructs the light-emitting diode to illuminate.

Description of Background Art

[0003] An example of a conventional light-emitting diode lighting circuit is shown in Fig. 2. In Fig. 2, light-emitting diodes (hereinafter, referred to as "LEDs") 1, 2 and 3, and resistors 4, 5 and 6 serially connected to the LEDs 1, 2 and 3, respectively, are connected to a battery 11 through a switch 7. By closing the switch 7, current flowing through the LEDs 1 to 3 and the resistors 4 to 6, and the LEDs 1 to 3 are illuminated.

[0004] It is preferable that the LEDs 1 to 3 are not illuminated when the

switch 7 is opened. Nevertheless, the LEDs 1 to 3 sometimes remain illuminated due to leakage even though the switch is opened. This is because impedances are high in LEDs.

[0005] Therefore, it is considered that lighting when the switch is opened is prevented by connecting separate resistors, besides the resistors 4 to 6, to the LEDs 1 to 3 in parallel to substantially reduce the impedances of the LEDs.

[0006] Moreover, a circuit is known which includes a constant current source circuit in order not to change current flowing in the LEDs even though a voltage applied to an LED drive circuit changes as set forth in Japanese Patent Laid-Open Publication No. Heisei 1-123483.

[0007] In the example wherein the resistors are connected to the LEDs in parallel, resistance values of the connected resistors have to be reduced to a leakage resistance value of the switch 7 (80Ω , for example). Therefore, an apparent load is increased. Further, large-capacity resistors are required to prevent heating. Therefore, flexibility in layout is reduced, and the costs is increased. Meanwhile, as for the example in which a constant current source circuit is provided, the circuit becomes complicated, and the costs are likely to be increased.

[0008] Therefore, it has been demanded to prevent erroneous lighting of the LEDs with a relatively simple circuit.

SUMMARY AND OBJECTS OF THE INVENTION

[0009] In the light of the above-mentioned demand, it is an object of the present invention is to provide a LED lighting circuit which can prevent erroneous lighting of LEDs when a switch is opened, with a relatively simple circuit structure.

[00010] In order to attain the above-mentioned object, the present invention has a first characteristic in that the lighting circuit, which turns on a semiconductor switching device to illuminate at least one LED, includes a differential amplifier, a switch, a reference resistor and at least one voltage-dividing resistor. The differential amplifier is provided at a preceding stage of the semiconductor switching device. The switch inputs a supply voltage on a positive input side of the differential amplifier. The reference resistor has one end connected to the positive input side of the differential amplifier and the other end that is grounded. The voltage-dividing resistor is connected to a negative input side of the differential amplifier and divides the supply voltage. In this lighting circuit, a resistance value R_{ref} of the reference resistor and a resistance value $R1/R2$ of the voltage-dividing resistor are decided such that a relationship between a leakage resistance value R_s of the switch and both resistance values R_{ref} and $R1/R2$ becomes $R_s > (R1/R2) \times R_{ref}$.

[00011] The present invention has a second characteristic in that, the LEDs are lights for an in-vehicle lighting device, and the switch is for illuminating the lighting device.

[00012] According to the foregoing characteristics, an output of the differential amplifier is not turned on since the reference resistance value and the voltage-dividing resistance value are decided such that the resistance values of the reference resistor and the voltage-dividing resistor as well as the leakage resistor have the aforementioned relationship. Hence, the LEDs are illuminated when the switch is closed, and current does not flow through the LEDs when the switch is opened even though there is leakage at the switch.

[00013] Further scope of applicability of the present invention will become apparent from the detailed description given hereinafter. However, it should be

understood that the detailed description and specific examples, while indicating preferred embodiments of the invention, are given by way of illustration only, since various changes and modifications within the spirit and scope of the invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art from this detailed description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[00014] The present invention will become more fully understood from the detailed description given hereinbelow and the accompanying drawings which are given by way of illustration only, and thus are not limitative of the present invention, and wherein:

[00015] Fig. 1 is a view showing an example of a LED lighting circuit according to one embodiment of the present invention; and

[00016] Fig. 2 is a view showing an example of a conventional LED lighting circuit.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[00017] Hereinbelow, one embodiment of the present invention will be described with reference to Fig. 1 which is a view showing an example of a LED lighting circuit. This LED lighting circuit is used as a stop lamp for a motorcycle. In this drawing, the stop lamp 8 is configured of n LEDs (twelve LEDs, for example) 9-1, 9-2, to 9n (hereinafter, referred to as "LEDs 9") and LED protective resistors 10-1, 10-2, to 10n, respectively, connected to the LEDs 9-1, 9-2, to 9n in series. An in-vehicle battery 11 is connected to an anode sides of the LEDs 9 through the LED protective resistors 10-1, 10-2, to 10n. Voltages of the battery 11 are applied to the LEDs 9.

[00018] The light circuit of the LEDs 9 has a NPN transistor 12 which serves as a semiconductor switching device and is connected to a cathode sides of the LEDs 9, and a differential amplifier 13 provided at a preceding stage of the transistor 12. The positive input side of the differential amplifier 13 is connected to the battery 11 through the switch 14, and is also grounded through the reference resistor R_{ref} . The negative input side of the differential amplifier 13 is connected to connection ends of the resistors R_1 and R_2 which divide a voltage of the battery 11. The other end of the resistor R_1 is connected to the battery 11, and the other end of the resistor R_2 is grounded. An input protective resistor R_b is connected between an output side of the differential amplifier 13 and the base of the transistor 12. Further, the output side of the differential amplifier 13 is pulled up by the resistor R_{up} . The switch 14 which is interlocked with a braking operation means of a motorcycle, i.e., a brake lever or a brake pedal, is usually open, and closed while braking.

[00019] Once brakes are applied while driving, the switch 14 is closed, and the voltage of the battery 11 is applied to the positive input side of the differential amplifier 13. The voltage divided by the voltage-dividing resistors R_1 and R_2 is applied to the negative input side of the differential amplifier 13. Therefore, an output is produced in the differential amplifier 13 by a discrepancy between the voltages of the positive and negative input sides. Thereafter, this output is applied to the base of the transistor 12 through the input protective resistor R_b . Due to this, the transistor 12 is turned on, and current flows in the LEDs 9. Then, the LEDs 9 are illuminated.

[00020] Considering the leakage of the switch 14, both ends of the switch 14 are connected through the leakage resistor R_s even when the switch 14 is open. Therefore, a condition in which the LEDs 9 are illuminated when the switch 14 is

open, that is, a condition in which the differential amplifier 13 produces an ON output is that $R_s < (R_1/R_2) \times R_{ref}$ is held. R_s denotes the leakage resistance value, and R_1 and R_2 denote the resistance values of the voltage-dividing resistors R_1 and R_2 .

[00021] Specifically, when the resistance value $(R_1/R_2) \times R_{ref}$ is greater than the leakage resistance value R_s , there is a possibility that the LEDs 9 are illuminated even when the switch 14 is open.

[00022] Accordingly, the resistance values of the resistors R_1 , R_2 and R_{ref} are decided such that the resistance value $(R_1/R_2) \times R_{ref}$ is smaller than the minimum value of the predicted leakage resistance R_s . The leakage resistance value R_s can be investigated in advance.

[00023] When deciding the resistance values of the resistors R_1 and R_2 under the above-mentioned condition, it is preferable that the voltage of the negative input side of the differential amplifier 13 is within a range of $1/10$ and $1/20$ of the supply voltage, i.e., the voltage of the battery 11.

[00024] The present invention has been described hereinabove with reference to the embodiment in which the LEDs 9 are the lights of the stop lamp for the motorcycle. However, the present invention is not limited to this embodiment, and can be broadly applied to circuits for illuminating LEDs in in-vehicle lighting devices such as a winker and a position lamp. When the LEDs are used for a winker, the switch 14 is interlocked with a turn signal operation lever. When the LEDs are used for a position lamp, the switch 14 is a switch for lighting the position lamp.

[00025] As is evident from the foregoing description, according to the invention defined in claims 1 and 2, the LEDs having high impedances are prevented from erroneous illumination, since the LED drive circuit is designed in

consideration of the leakage resistance of the switch. It is not required to provide large capacity resistors connected to the LEDs in parallel, thereby resulting in higher flexibility in layout within a lamp housing. In addition, the circuit can be simplified in comparison with the case where the constant current source circuit is provided.

[00026] The invention being thus described, it will be obvious that the same may be varied in many ways. Such variations are not to be regarded as a departure from the spirit and scope of the invention, and all such modifications as would be obvious to one skilled in the art are intended to be included within the scope of the following claims.